
Title: Symptoms (part 1)

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“Clainin! Behind you!”

Dawn leapt through the air over Clainin’s head as he ducked. She brought her grandfather’s sword down into the head of a bogling, splitting it neatly in half. The beast gurgled out a final squeal as it shivered to the ground and almost instantly started to decompose. Dawn looked around the clearing quickly to see if any more of the plant monsters threatened to attack, but they seemed to be safe for the moment. The Juka were still concentrated in the inner city, safely away.

“Fascinating!” Clainin leaned down close to the dead creature and began scraping bits of it into glass bottles.

“I’m very glad that you find this so interesting,” Dawn chided him. “But there was no reason for you to come with me to Yew if you wanted bits of bogling. I could have brought them back for you.” She tugged on her armor awkwardly. “And I could have taken this armor off sooner.” Clainin stayed fixated on the bogling corpse while he worked. “That is the armor of a Royal Knight, Dawn, you should be honored to wear it.”

"I am honored... I just wish that being honored were a bit more comfortable. I could fight better in my own clothes. Not to mention maintain some of my modesty."

"I think I know how you feel... figuratively speaking." Clainin looked up at her and grinned. "Nystul's lab still feels a bit too big for me. But, like everyone, I have a duty and I am adjusting to his absence." Dawn sheathed her sword and sat on a fallen log near Clainin. "Speaking of absence, why did Dupre not accompany you? You said this mission was important; I assumed he would be here."

"Faction business." He held up the bottle and peered intently at the contents as he spoke. "That blasted war is wearing him out. And you're right, this mission is important, which is why you're here. Dupre trusts you implicitly." He looked at Dawn and smiled. "Who wouldn't trust a Royal Knight?"

She smirked at Clainin, "So you can trust me with the details of the mission?"

"Ah, yes, I'm sorry. I've been so caught up in this..." he looked down at the corpse of the bogling which was starting to look like any other pile of decayed vegetation, "...mess. A representative of the Meer asked me to meet them here; they said it was drastically important. I can only assume it has

something to do with our new plant friends.”

Behind the pair a sparkle of light appeared, with a magical hum that grew louder as the illumination became brighter. Dawn quickly rose to her feet. She spun around with her sword at the ready. As the light faded, Adranath appeared with Dasha beside him. Dawn relaxed and sheathed her sword again.

“You are very quick with your weapon, young one.” Dasha started to smile at Dawn, but began to cough violently. Adranath put a hand on her shoulder to steady her.

Clainin stepped forward nervously and bowed in front of the ancient Meer. “You must be Adranath. It is an honor to finally meet you.”

Adranath’s brow wrinkled. He looked Clainin up and down and took a quick glance around the area. “I was to meet with the senior mage... he is detained?”

Clainin looked at Dawn nervously and quickly back to Adranath. “I... I am the senior mage.”

“One so young!”

Adranath’s eyes widened with surprise. He could see Clainin was embarrassed. “You must be extraordinarily talented. Forgive me; the honor is mine.” He bowed deeply, much to Clainin’s relief. As he stood straight again he coughed, although he tried to conceal it between clenched teeth.

Clanin spoke cautiously,
“Forgive me for asking,
Adranath... you and
Dasha do not seem well.
If you have need of cure
potions I can provide you
with some.”

“No potion will aid us, I
fear. We cannot stay for
long; being so close to
Yew makes our illness
worse. But it was
necessary to come here,
so that I could see the
damage we have caused.”
“Damage?” Dawn asked.
“There have been
strange plant creatures
appearing across the land,
but I see no damage to
Yew.”

“The damage I speak of
is the source of the
beasts, and I fear it may
be the source of more.
In our attempt to stop
the Juka attacks we may
have done a great deal
more harm than good.”
The Eternal paused to
cough again. “I can feel
it growing beneath us
just being here...”

“Something is growing in
Yew?” Clanin asked.

“The decay.” Adranath
answered. “An ancient
spell of the Meer. In the
past we used the decay
only in times of great
need when such a dark
use of nature was the
only option we could see
for survival. The spell
would seize our enemies
and rot them into the
soil within moments.
Entire legions of Juka
could be reduced to
nothing. The decay was a
horrible act of
destruction that forces
nature to do its darkest

work.”

“And you’ve used this spell here in Yew?” Dawn asked. “The Juka seem unaffected.”

“We attempted it and something went wrong. We were not sure what exactly until the bog things began to appear. Nature is...different than it once was. Throughout the ages evil has corrupted it; forced it to change and adapt itself in ways unnatural. It skewed our decay spell into something much more powerful and, I believe, evil. Not only has it created the plant beasts but also it has corrupted the Meer with illness. We were preparing ourselves to attack the Juka when we fell ill.” Adranath was again struck with a fit of violent hacking coughs that made the humans uncomfortable just hearing them.

“If this spell is still growing as you say then these monsters could be just the start of our worries. The way you describe it...the spell has affected the land itself?” Clainin couldn’t comprehend what such magic could do. “The prospects are frightening.”

Dasha stepped forward, suppressing another attack of coughs before she spoke. “We have come to accept your offer of allegiance against the Juka.” Looking at Dawn, and clearly swallowing a great deal of her pride, Dasha held her hand out, palm forward with her fingers pointing up. After a moment Dawn

lifted her own arm and held her palm in front of the Meer's, unsure of what to do next. Dasha pressed their hands together and interlocked her fingers with Dawn's and gripped firmly before releasing. The two smiled at each other for the first time.

"You have my apologies for our arrogance," Adaranth replied. We come from a time when humans were very different than they are now, the idea of needing your assistance before was...new...to us."

Adranath slowly turned and looked around the wilderness of Yew.

"Now, we wish to help rectify the mistake we have made with our magic."

"What else will the spell do? Will we see more of these plant beasts?" Clainin asked.